United Nations E/CN.6/2006/NGO/30

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 January 2006

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fiftieth session
27 February-10 March 2006
Item 3 (c)*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2006/1.

06-22519 (E) 080206

Statement

We, international NGOs committed through direct service and advocacy to the human rights and empowerment of women and girls, welcome this opportunity to submit a statement on enhanced participation, ensuring an enabling environment and equal participation of women. These themes are crucial to the development of a world of human dignity and security.

We state unequivocally and with utmost urgency that the current global situation is characterized by a disabling environment in which women cannot fully participate and in which gender equality is an unattainable dream. The global environment is one in which women, because of their gender, are the objects of multiple forms of public and private violence in all cultures, in all societies. Until and unless this gender paradigm by which women are real and potential objects of male aggression changes we cannot hope to realize the advancement of women in social, political or economic life.

We applaud the current process of the preparation of the Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Women. We look forward to seeing groundbreaking analysis in the Study. We urge the Study to clearly name and address ancient and socially embedded forms of violence such as the prostitution of women. We hope that the Study will clarify that the source of Violence Against Women stems from the current social constructs of gender, by which men are the main perpetrators of violence against women. We are hopeful that this study will take our international community beyond previous rhetoric into practical and real social changes that will both eliminate Violence against Women and permanently change the structures that perpetuate Violence against Women.

We remind this Commission that Violence Against Women is so prevalent, persistent and widespread across cultures that it goes unquestioned by members of society, both victims and perpetrators. We note that the cultural acceptance of Violence Against Women invests instruments of mass media, language development, and popular entertainment such as music and pornographic images, with the power to legitimate oppressive patriarchal systems. Furthermore, many men and women remain silent – neither standing up nor speaking out against gender violence. All in society become desensitized to these patterns. We note with particular concern the increasing sexualized images of women and girls that turn them into objects of consumer product promotion. Systems that sexualize and market women and girls for consumer consumption can never promote the kinds of enabling environments and equality that this Commission seeks to support.

We have seen, where military structures dominate, the acceptance of Violence Against Women becomes ever more deeply embedded. This is evident in the rampant rate of uninhibited rape during war, the use of girl-soldiers, the growing trafficking of women for prostitution, and the deepening plight of rural women more and more dependent on male members of families. Such dependency is particularly visible in the current economic systems that disadvantage women. Consequently, the inferiority of women becomes entrenched in the very structures of law, official policy, language, and religious and cultural beliefs. Violence against Women is not only accepted but it is normalized.

As we consider this environment of Violence Against Women, we recall the words of Secretary General Kofi Annan:

> *"Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace."*[1]

And we recall the words of an NGO speaker at the NGO hearings of June 2005 in preparation for the Millenium+5 Summit, General Assembly of September 2005:

> "We, the women and girls of the world, fear war and all the violence that warlike acts bring against us: rape; sexual violence; displacement; death; hunger; abusive power used to humiliate the mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters of the defeated; sexual abuses and the prostitution that belligerent forces, regular troops, and even peace units impose on women…

1 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, 1999

We, the women and girls of the world, fear gender discrimination, a discrimination that kills thousands of girls before being born, and which condemns those who are born to lack of opportunities, violence, exploitation, malnutrition, marginalization, inequality, and traditional practices harmful to their bodies and their human dignity…

We, the women and girls in developing countries, fear poverty - …the feminization of poverty is rising and threatens the world.

We, the women and girls of the world, fear gender violence, a violence that is exercised just as much in the public sphere as in the private sphere and continues unabated. Women and girls continue suffering violence routinely in their homes, where they should be guaranteed the right to life, integrity, and personal security.
We also fear gender equality politics among the member States and multilateral organizations when their practices do not reflect the commitments of the Millennium Declaration or the Report of the Secretary General, "In Larger Freedom." We fear the discrepancy between political words and actions, especially when the organizations that protect and promote the rights of women and girls have faced minimum resources, infrastructure and funds.

We fear any law or political agenda that legitimizes prostitution as work, and therefore facilitates the expansion of sexual exploitation as a business, putting women and girls in great danger. This is not simply about the phenomenon of migration or tourism, it is a way of perpetuating stereotypes and traditions in which the bodies of women and girls, available for the sexual pleasure of men, are considered to be consumer goods that can be bought, sold, or rented.[2]"

Concerned with the urgency of these issues, we call on this Commission to:

- Fully support the current Study of the Secretary General.
- Speak on behalf of additional resources, beyond the Study, to gather more refined data and statistics on the prevalence and extent and reality of all forms of violence against women, including prostitution.
- Organize, within the Commission's aegis, within all societal sectors throughout the international community, ongoing opportunities for discussion, analysis and solution promotion on the issue of Violence Against Women.

Aware of all government promises to eliminate Violence Against Women we call on Governments to:

1. Make clear, specific and local recommendations not only about ending particular forms of violence but on transforming systemic social structures such as patriarchy and economic systems that unremittingly disadvantage women.

2. Adopt and actively enforce anti-trafficking legislation. Use the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the recent UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children for the foundations of national and regional legislation.

2 The Informal Interactive Hearings Of The General Assembly With Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations And The Private Sector, UN, June 23, 24 2005. Ms. Teresa Columba ULLOA, Speaker for the Hearing on Freedom From FEAR Cluster.

3. Sign and enforce the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

4. Include in States-parties' mandated reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, relative to article 6 of the Convention, an evaluation of the legal status of the prostitution of women, including efforts to prosecute perpetrators, decriminalize women in prostitution, and penalize the demand.

5. Articulate a coherent national policy that explicitly denounces all violence, including the prostitution of women, as a violation of the human rights of women.

6. Review and amend laws that structurally support inferiority of women (e.g., dowry laws, marriage laws, property laws, etc.)

7. Establish preventive policies and protocols that address the root causes of Violence Against Women, including political and economic structures, systems of male dominance, and social tolerance for violence against women.

8. Address the issue of global armed conflict and militarization and ensure the protection of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations.

and,

9. Support public service campaigns on national levels that will promulgate clear messages that oppose violence against women and that articulate support for gender equality in all spheres of life.

We in the NGO community will continue to support and work enthusiastically in partnership with all such initiatives by States Parties.

This statement is endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council:

Congregations of St. Joseph
Catholic International Education Office
Gray Panthers
International Federation of Business and Professional Women
International Federation of University Women
International Federation of Women in Legal Careers
International Federation of Women Lawyers
International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation
Mouvement pour l'abolition de la prostitution et de la pornographie et de toutes formes de violence sexuelles et discrimination sexistes
National Council of Women
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries
Soroptimist International
World ORT Union